Varieties and Methodological Challenges in Ethnographic Research on Education

January 21st – 23rd 2016

University of Teacher Education Zurich / Pädagogische Hochschule Zürich

SNF - International Exploratory Workshop

organized by

Research Group Children, Childhood and Schooling
University of Teacher Education Zurich

University Centre for Education in the Early Childhood
University of Fribourg
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Address

Pädagogische Hochschule Zürich / University of Teacher Education
Lagerstrasse 2
CH 8090 Zürich
Switzerland

Phone / Web / AV Technology

The main phone number of the University is +41 (0)43 305 55 55

During the workshop you can call +41 (0)76 317 28 84 (Christoph Maeder) if you need assistance.

Web: www.phzh.ch

Audio- and Video-technology is provided by a system that connects to lap-tops or a local computer for USB-sticks.

How to get there - Map of the Campus

The campus is situated right next to the main train station (Zurich HB or Hauptbahnhof Zürich). From the airport you can take any train going to Zurich HB. The ride is about 12 minutes. The trains with the numbers S 16 and S2 leave the airport about every 20 minutes.
Conference Hotel

Hotel Walhalla  
Limmatstrasse 5  
CH 8005 Zurich

Phone +41 44 446 54 00

http://www.walhalla-hotel.ch/welcome/switzerland/

The hotel is situated on the north side of the main train station (HAUPTBAHNHOF ZÜRICH) opposite the LANDESMUSEUM. If you arrive by train on tracks 1 to 16 the hotel is to your left.

The University of Teacher Education Zurich (Pädagogische Hochschule Zürich, PHZH) is on the south side. There is an underground passage, a 5 to 10 minutes walk that connects the two places.

Conference Diner

The conference diner takes place at the Restaurant "Viadukt"  
Viaduktstrasse 69/71  
8005 Zurich  
Phone +41 (0)43 204 18 99 .

http://www.restaurant-viadukt.ch/

All presenters will be picked up at the Hotel Walhalla in order to go to the conference diner. Further information will be provided at the Workshop.

W-LAN

- Eduroam is available on the Campus
- PHZH-GUEST is an open public access network (some restrictions apply)
- Presenters and the participants will get an extra access at the registration for the workshop
Description of the Workshop

Ethnography has become an empirically important approach in order to describe, understand and analyse the world of education in our globalized world. Due to the core of the method - participant observation - ethnography is capable of showing and understanding how education is done, performed, acted out, or even achieved as a joint production of different participants in various settings.

The processes of educating can be addressed in multifaceted ways: as a universal and structural feature of humanity, as a complex matrix of an institutional order, as webs of meaning, as situated practices of doing things together, or as embedded cultural themes and models. This list is not exhaustive. It refers to different social science disciplines using ethnography (like e.g. social anthropology, educational science, sociology, socio-linguistics) as a research method.

The workshop brings together ten important scholars from different “ethno”-disciplines and diverse countries in order to demonstrate and to explore the potential of the ethnographic research in the field of education. The workshop includes twenty invited scientists in different stages of their professional career from Switzerland and Germany. This setting follows the framework given by the Swiss National Research Foundation’s program for “International Exploratory Workshops” as means to foster excellence in research in Switzerland.

Overview: Timetable of the Workshop, Rooms

*Thursday 21st of January, Room LAB H014*

13.00 – 18.00 Module 1: Ethnography, Culture and Education

*Friday 22nd of January, Room LAA M021*

09.00 – 13.00 Module 2: Ethnography, Schooling and Education

13.00 – 14.00 Lunch

14.00 – 18.15 Module 3: Ethnography, Interaction and Education

20.00 Conference Diner at Restaurant Viadukt (see: Miscellaneous Information)

*Saturday 23rd of January, Room LAA L041*

09.00 – 12.15 Module 4: Ethnography, Childhood Studies and Education

13.00 End of the Workshop
### Program of the Modules of the Workshop

**Thursday 21st of January, Room LAB H014** (also available LAA K 040, LAA L 040)

13.00 – 13.15 Welcome and Opening of the Meeting: Peter Tremp & Christoph Maeder, Zürich

**Module 1: Ethnography, Culture and Education (Social and Cultural Anthropology)**

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.15</td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong> (Anja Sieber Egger, Zürich)</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:30</td>
<td><strong>Culture and Educational Ethnography in the United States, 2000 – 2015</strong> (Margaret Eisenhart, Colorado, U.S.A.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:15</td>
<td><strong>How to study large-scale processes of university reform ethnographi-</strong></td>
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<td>15:00</td>
<td><strong>Break</strong></td>
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<td>15:30</td>
<td><strong>Generating Ethnographic Research Questions: An Anthropologi-</strong></td>
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<td>16:15</td>
<td><strong>Visual voicing. Participatory ethnography in a multilingual minor-</strong></td>
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<td>17.15</td>
<td><strong>Group Discussion</strong></td>
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<td>18.00</td>
<td><strong>Roundtable with Presenters and Workshop Participants (Moderator Gisela Unterweger, Zürich)</strong></td>
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**Friday 22nd of January, Room LAA M 021** (also available: LAA L 042, LAB G 081)

**Module 2: Ethnography, Schooling and Education (Educational Science),**

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<tr>
<td>09.00</td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong> (Melanie Kuhn, Fribourg, Switzerland)</td>
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<td>09.15</td>
<td><strong>Youth creativity and learning: A meta-ethnographic synthesis of rese</strong></td>
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<td>10.15</td>
<td><strong>Constructions of Diversity in Teachers’ Assessment of Pupils. Relatio</strong></td>
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<td>11.00</td>
<td><strong>Break</strong></td>
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<td>11:30</td>
<td><strong>Group Discussion</strong></td>
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<td>12.15</td>
<td><strong>Roundtable with Presenters and Workshop Participants (Moderator Melan</strong></td>
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<td>13.00</td>
<td><strong>Lunch (Mensa)</strong></td>
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Module 3: Ethnography, Interaction and Education (Sociology – Ethnomethodology)

14.00 – 14.15

**Introduction** (Christoph Maeder, Zürich)

14.15 – 15.00

*From preliminaries to analysis: Talk, social structure and educational practices through an ethnomethodological lens* (Susan Danby, Brisbane, Australia)

15.15 – 16.00

*Do it yourself? Radical ethnomethodology and its hybrid heuristics* (Philippe Sormani, Rome, Italy)

16.00 – 16.30

Break

16.30 – 17.15

Group Discussion

17.30 – 18.15

Roundtable with Presenters and Workshop Participants (Moderator: Christoph Maeder)

19.00 Get together for the Apéro at: Bogen F, Heinrichstrasse 221, 8005 Zürich

20.30 Conference Diner at the Restaurant Viadukt (see: Miscellaneous Information)

Saturday 23rd of January, Room LAA L 041 (also available LAA K 040, LAA L 042)

Module 4: Ethnography, Childhood Studies and Education (Geography / Educational Science)

09.00 – 09.15:  

**Introduction** (Sascha Neumann, Fribourg, Switzerland)

09.15 – 10.00

What is participation for? (Lesley Gallacher, Northumbria, U.K.)

10.15 – 11.00

*An Ethnography of Multilingualism in Early Childhood Education and Care: Language Practices and Processes of Institutionalisation in Luxembourgish Early Childcare Settings* (Claudia Seele, Luxemburg)

11.00 – 11.30

Break

11.30 – 12.15

Final Event: “Prospects and challenges. Where to go and what to do with ethnography in education?” Roundtable with all the presenters of the workshop (Moderator: Sascha Neumann)

12.15 – 13.00

Bye-bye coffee

13.15 Closing of the Workshop
Abstracts

Youth creativity and learning: A meta-ethnographic synthesis of research from multi-poverty, multi-cultural suburbs in Sweden (Dennis Beach)

Dennis Beach, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

There is an extensively mediatized discourse in Sweden about a disparity of educational performance between groups of students defined by socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity and gender. Different factors are suggested to account for the disparity and policies have been introduced to address them. The value of middle-class cultural capital is often highlighted as is the importance of parental involvement, pupil motivation, and the concentration of pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds in low-achieving, highly segregated housing areas and their schools. Backed up by national statistics, young males are described as particularly at risk and concern is voiced concerning their future integration into society and, in recent years, their possible recruitment into criminal subcultures and terrorist cells. The present article relates to ethnographic research conducted in multi-poverty, multi-cultural suburbs in Sweden where many of the young men who are defined as at risk are found. A message about the creativity and learning potential of these young men that isn’t always identified in school is presented.

Ethnography is based on long-term engagement. It involves not only attentively watching what is going on at a particular place and also intentionally listening and feeling as well, with the aim of opening up possibilities for thinking differently about the lives, actions and experiences of people there. It is particularly strong at getting inside everyday life and providing details that may be missed by other research. High premium is placed on this insider perspective. Meta-ethnography is the name given to the method of inquiry behind the present presentation. This method is built up from close analyses of a number of ethnographic investigations. It recognises and respects ethnography’s strengths and is based on comparative cross-case analyses and close analytical reading of related ethnographic studies.
Constructions of Diversity in Teachers’ Assessment of Pupils. Relationships between Implicit and Explicit Knowledge (Jürgen Budde)

Jürgen Budde, Europa University Flensburg, Germany

Diversity, heterogeneity or social differences have become an important issue in school. There is a lot of knowledge that schools (re)produce differences along social categories and that this leads to social inequality. But we know little about the ways, the practices, how these processes are going on. In teachers’ assessment of pupils, constructions of diversity often become apparent. Social categories as gender, race, class, family situations, skills or achievement play an important role in planning, doing and thinking about teaching. The ways teachers are dealing with these categories are diverse and limited through individual attitudes, curricular standards or specific educational promotion programs. Analysing the function of the use of social categories, two different modes of bringing them up can be identified:

- Explicit thematizations (e.g. Gender issues in turn taking, seating or when reflecting about pupils)
- Implicit thematizations.

In ethnographical school and lesson research projects, it is easy to identify the first mode because it refers to cognitive conceptions of diversity while the second isn’t easy to analyse because it refers to tacit practical dimensions of teaching in a sense of ‘doing lesson’.

The contribution aims to discuss the relationship between implicit and explicit knowledge when using diversity in school lessons. The thesis is that implicit and explicit knowledge are neither the same nor totally different but linked in a specific way which constitutes and constructs pedagogical activities at the same time. For an understanding of constructions of diversity this perspective offers new insights. I want to discuss this point with empirical data from an ethnographical school research project which focuses on school lessons and teachers’ comments after the lessons.
From preliminaries to analysis: Talk, social structure and educational practices through an ethnomethodological lens (Susan Danby)

Susan Danby, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

In this presentation, I discuss how I approach analysing orders of everyday action in educational settings from an ethnomethodological perspective. Drawing on video segments, I show the analytical procedures that ethnomethodologists use to make visible the phenomenon under investigation, such as how teachers and students accomplish activities such as disputes, and knowledge construction and ownership.

An ethnomethodological investigation always begins with the question of “what is going on here and how is it being accomplished?”. With a focus on describing members’ resources for accomplishing activities, analytic attention is directed towards the situated perspectives of members and their practical reasoning as they go about their everyday activities. Working from a competence framework, we are interested in members’ interpretative procedures as they make meaning of their social worlds. The analyst does not interpret the intentions of the members, but rather works with the visible and audible structures of members’ talk and interaction.

Teacher-child interactions, class lessons, informal learning contexts such as play, teacher-parent communication, and student-student interaction, each offer understandings of the educational and social orders being collaboratively co-constructed by the members. These socially organized activities are predominantly explored through participant observation, video/audio recorded interactions, and taking notes. The analytic approach is undertaken through a series of procedural steps that make visible the situated actions of members, and their use of social structures of language, such as turn taking, to produce their social worlds. An exploration of how an ethnomethodological lens describes and observes everyday life in the classroom offers up possibilities for discussion of its relationship with ethnography.
Culture and Educational Ethnography in the United States, 2000-2015 (Margaret Eisenhart)

Margaret Eisenhart, University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado, USA

Historically theories of “culture” have guided the educational ethnography done by anthropologists in the United States. Over time, different theories have predominated, and the concept of culture has been rigorously critiqued and challenged. More than ten years ago, I drew attention to changing conceptions of culture and their implications for educational research, including educational ethnography, in the U.S. (Eisenhart, 2001). By that time, conceptions of culture as a relatively coherent set of beliefs and practices, associated with a bounded group and reproduced from one generation to the next, had given way to conceptions of culture as dynamic, widely circulating, contested, and productive. These changing conceptions of culture were influenced by evolving perspectives within cultural anthropology as well as by critiques from postmodern, ethnic, and feminist scholars. In my earlier paper, I discussed some corresponding changes to ethnography including more collaborative relationships between researchers and participants and trends toward multi-sited ethnographies and experimental writing styles. In the intervening years, these trends have become clearer and some new ones have emerged. In this presentation, I take up this history again and update it with what I think are three trends with special implications for educational ethnography: multi-scale ethnography; community-engaged scholarship; and virtual or digital ethnography.
Generating Ethnographic Research Questions: An Anthropological Contribution to the Study of Higher Education (Torbjörn Friberg)

Torbjörn Friberg, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

As part of recent complex transformations, it seems that higher educational organisations are being forced to reorganise, standardise and streamline in order to survive in the new political and economic context. How are ethnographers in general going to approach contemporary these phenomena? By drawing on the conceptual history of anthropology, the aim of this article is to generate ethnographic-oriented research questions concerned with higher education. The first part of the article provides an ethnographic background, while the second part focuses on Paul Willis’s reasoning on ethnographic imagination, as a prerequisite for generating alternative research questions. The third part makes explicit anthropologist Maurice Godelier’s theoretical imagination, carving out some specific theoretical parts which may be used in the generating process. The conclusion then suggests a number of questions to be asked by future ethnographers of higher education. The questions are followed by a reflection upon the consequences of doing ethnography within contemporary higher education settings, which are increasingly dominated by policymakers; ethnography is thus to be seen as an intervening instrument.
What is participation for? (Lesley A. Gallacher)

Lesley Anne Gallacher, Northumbria University, United Kingdom

The issue of children’s participation has been an important focus of research in Childhood Studies in recent years. This interest is often advanced in terms of the participation rights set out UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), but is also grounded in epistemological arguments surrounding both who can be considered an ‘expert’ on childhood and the need to involve or support children and young people in (re)constructing childhood in society. In this sense, the question of children’s participation has become something of a methodological debate within all the academic endeavours that we might describe as Childhood Studies. In setting out the paradigm that has characterised much of the work in Childhood Studies over the last 3 decades, James and Prout (1990) awarded ethnography an especially prominent position within Childhood Studies because it affords children and young people a more direct voice in research than many more traditional survey methods. Of the six features James and Prout identified, this contention has perhaps been the most challenged in the intervening years, with many researchers arguing for the need to develop a range of innovative (and ‘child-friendly’) methods that, it is very often claimed, will enable children to participate more effectively in research. In this paper, I want to consider why academic researchers have so often focused on so-called ‘participatory methods’ in this way. As such, I want to consider what we (as researchers in Childhood Studies and allied areas) think participation is for, and the extent to which these methodological concerns matter in supporting children and young people’s participation in society.
Visual voicing. Participatory ethnography in a multilingual minority classroom (Sari Pietikäinen)

Sari Pietikäinen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

In this paper, I talk about “visual voicing” as a possibility to both examine and encourage multilingual resources and practices in education. I will draw on my longstanding ethnographic work in multilingual minority schools in the indigenous Sámiland in the Northern Finland. I will argue that changing multilingual and endangered language spaces, such as the Sámi-medium classroom, are revealing crucial sites to explore what kind of multimodal and multilingual practices and agencies become possible, preferable or undesirable for children with various linguistic and cultural capital and trajectories. I will illustrate how the use of visual tasks and activities, such as drawing, photography, and producing little books, can be used to engage children in participatory school ethnography and thereby promote their agency to create and transform the multilingual practices in their own immediate environment. Furthermore, these activities can be used to raise the children’s multilingual awareness and encourage them to use their multilingual repertoires. I conclude by reflecting on the value of visual creativity in a changing multilingual minority language education context.
An Ethnography of Multilingualism in Early Childhood Education and Care: Language Practices and Processes of Institutionalisation in Luxembourgish Early Childcare Settings (Claudia Seele)

Claudia Seele, Ministère de l’Éducation nationale, de l’Enfance et de la Jeunesse, Grand-Duché de Luxembourg – Service de Coordination de la Recherche et de l’Innovation pédagogiques et technologiques (SCRIPT)

The presented research connects educational and sociolinguistic concerns by asking how the social realities of early childcare settings are constituted through everyday language practices. It enquires how language as a social practice contributes to the institutionalisation of early childhood education and care (ECEC), i.e. infusing it with meaning and value and supporting its legitimacy and taken-for-grantedness as an educational practice. This line of questioning is motivated both by current developments of social, welfare and educational policies in Luxembourg and beyond, as well as by broader theoretical and methodological trends in educational and sociolinguistic research. On the one hand, the dynamic expansion of the Luxembourgish ECEC system and its political redefinition into a distinct sector of non-formal education leaves us with questions about the actual impact of these developments on the everyday practice in the day-care centres. On the other hand, recent theoretical and methodological considerations make us sceptical of presupposing ‘education’ as a predefined attribute of this practice and lead us to focus on the ongoing processes of its active accomplishment. In the highly heterogeneous and multilingual context of Luxembourg, language practices prove to be an important entry point into inquiring these larger social and education theoretical issues. Drawing on both, an ethnography of multilingualism and an ethnography of early childhood education and care, an integrated methodological approach finally asks how the ‘doing of education’ proceeds in an through the ‘doing of language’ in the everyday life of the childcare centres. How is language used to imbue the everyday practice of the centres with educational value? How do the social actors in this multilingual setting draw on language practices to differentially address and position each other, thus constituting a local institutional order? How do they relate to normative expectations about language promotion and educational quality? And how do the children themselves contribute to the institutionalisation of the early educational practice?
Do it yourself? Radical ethnomethodology and its hybrid heuristics (Philippe Sormani)

Philippe Sormani, Istituto Svizzero Roma, Italy

In Ethnomethodology's Program (2002), H. Garfinkel required of his students to practice the very activity that they were examining. No genuine understanding of its constitutive procedures could be gained, according to Garfinkel, unless the analyst would engage in the practical activity under scrutiny. This talk does not ponder over the reasonable, trivial or absurd character of the outlined requirement. Instead, it reports on (some of) the insights to be gained from such a 'do it yourself' policy. Examples will be taken from video-recorded instructional situations of 'esoteric' practices (experimental physics and/or amateur Go, to begin with). Radical ethnomethodology will thus be presented in and as its hybrid heuristics, having both sociological and technical insights to offer.
How to study large-scale processes of university reform ethnographically? (Susan Wright)

Susan Wright, Danish School of Education, Denmark

There has been a torrent of university reforms in the global North and South, as countries tried to position their universities as ‘drivers’ of a posited future global knowledge economy. International agencies, notably the OECD, the EU and Bologna Process, and the World Bank, defined the knowledge economy, produced guideless and check lists of required policy reforms, and formulated methods of measuring countries’ achievements. Governments have avidly reformed their universities and often presented in what Shore and Wright (2011) call an ‘authoritative instrumentalist’ approach to policy making. That is, politicians and civil servants often expect that their laws, devised at the top of a system, will percolate down through universities, changing the way their governance and the focus of their work on the way, so that they implement the law’s provisions on people at the bottom, whose lives, they expect, will be changed in the way originally envisaged. Such policy makers are clearly part of the ethnography, but are not the whole story.

Even laws which emanate from central government rarely follow a linear path to implementation: more often a policy process starts in incidents or campaigns outside central government; changes can be initiated by academics’ generating new ideas from their own professionalism or by students envisaging alternative ways of teaching a discipline or acting on the world. By taking what Shore and Wright (2011: 21) call a ‘democratic’ approach to policy, a wide range of people and institutions are treated as active participants in a policy ‘field’. While unequally positioned, they can still be actively involved in shaping the kinds of institutions and policy worlds they wish to inhabit. The paper will outline the methodology developed in a longitudinal study of Danish university reforms. Far from policy makers’ top-down or ‘authoritative instrumentalist’ approach, and in ways more complicated than Nader’s ‘studying up’ approach, ethnographically ‘studying through’ (Wright and Reinhold 2011) is to track debates and conflicts as they range back and forth across multiple sites through space, through time, and to trace through this process of contestation, how transformations in the key terms of the debate about universities and about wider forms of governance come about.
# People

## Presenters

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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The Organizers

The teams of the Research Group CCS from Zurich and the Centre ZeFF from Fribourg work together in promoting and advancing ethnographic research on education in Switzerland and elsewhere. Our goal is to establish ethnography as one of the state of the art research strategies in the domain of education in the country.

Research Group on Children, Childhood and Schooling (CCS), Zurich

Our research group is doing research on the everyday culture in Swiss public schools. We integrate the perspectives of social anthropology and sociology to investigate important aspects of the daily life in educational settings.

Our focus is on the constitution and construction of the social order as a local and situated practice. Using ethnographic methods, we analyse rituals, the use and meaning of artefacts, the handling of norms and rules, as well as aspects of the children's peer culture.

Currently we are working on practices of differentiation in the Kindergarten. This research is sponsored by the Swiss National Research Foundation (SNF). Besides this we engage in methods and methodology, research on ICT-use in classrooms, evaluation of a mentoring programme and others.

www.phzh.ch

University Centre for Research on Early Childhood Education (ZeFF), Fribourg

Our research group is part of the German-speaking division at the Department of Educational Research at the University of Fribourg. We are responsible for the Center of Early Childhood Education (ZeFF) which is the only one of its kind in Switzerland at the University Level.

The members of this research group have conducted several ethnographic studies in early childhood education institutions in several countries (Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland), organized international conferences on issues of ethnographic research and are contributing regularly to the theoretical and epistemological debate on participant observation and ethnography in educational sciences and childhood studies.

Currently, our research group is conducting several ethnographic research projects focusing on multilingualism in early childhood education before school as well as on agency and participation of young children in these settings.

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